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ABSTRACT

Effective organizational communication can greatly enhance the quality of the school environment and professional/personal relationships. This book focuses on successful communication skills that can help make the school environment a productive experience for administrators, school staff, students, and parents. Chapter 1 discusses the importance of effective communication for organizational effectiveness and identifies the characteristics of successful communication. Chapter 2 describes some of the pitfalls involved in the communication process and offers strategies for avoiding them. The third chapter discusses the crucial roles played by self-esteem, perceptions, and effective listening in communication and offers suggestions for enhancing the self-esteem of teachers and staff. The importance of nonverbal communication and how it functions are described in the fourth chapter. The final chapter presents strategies for creating a supportive communication climate and for coping with conflict. An annotated bibliography of 17 sources is included. (LMI)

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Keys to Communication

A Handbook for School Success

Doreen S. Geddes

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Foreword

Doreen Geddes has spent most of her career as a specialist in the area of communication, and she combines her research and teaching experience in *Keys to Communication: A Handbook for School Success*. This brief book is packed full of helpful information, and the author provides a roadmap for teachers and administrators who wish to improve all of their communication skills.

Written in an easy-to-read language and style, the book provides a wealth of illustrative examples. It is the type of handbook that practitioners will keep on their desks for use as a ready reference. For those who wish to explore the contents in more depth, Geddes has provided an annotated bibliography of helpful resources.

If you feel you need to improve your communication, this handbook is for you. If you're looking for a refresher course on communication skills, this handbook is for you. And for those of you who are about to begin your administrative careers, this book will be a very important aid. Enjoy it and learn from it!

JERRY J. HERMAN
JANICE L. HERMAN
Series Co-Editors

About the Author

Doreen S. Geddes received her Ph.D. in speech communication from Pennsylvania State University. She is Associate Professor of Speech and Communication Studies at Clemson University, where she teaches courses in organizational, interpersonal, small-group, gender, nonverbal, and public communication. She was a member of the Pearce Center Advisory Committee, which sponsors Clemson University's Communication Across the Curriculum Program. She has received a number of grants and awards to conduct research and to sponsor communication speakers at Clemson University and in the Carolinas.

She has authored articles and presented papers on her research at numerous national and regional speech communication conferences. Her research and publications have focused on sex roles in management, perceptions of powerful and powerless speech styles for managers, regional differences in communication, communication problems associated with growing up in an alcoholic home, and methods of teaching speech communication. She is past president of the Carolinas Speech Communication Association.

More than 10 of her over 20 years of teaching experience has been in developing and conducting communication and management seminars for business, government, and education. Her early education experience was teaching in the public schools.

Introduction

How effective is the communication among the administrators, teachers, staff, students, and parents in your school system? Even if you rate the overall effectiveness high, you probably still see pockets that could use improvement. Unfortunately, most of you reading this book are aware of numerous areas in your school system that need a communication overhaul. Although you may be bombarded with communication (written and oral) in your job, *effective* communication is not usually the norm in school systems and organizations. This book focuses on successful communication skills that can help make the school environment a productive experience for administrators, school professional and support staff, students, and parents. By applying the communication skills discussed here, you can enhance the quality of your school environment and your professional and personal relationships. The same communication skills that create effective organizations, create satisfying personal and professional relationships as well.

Keys to Communication: A Handbook for School Success will help school administrators as well as all educators, regardless of their titles or positions, in improving communication in their schools. It can be used in staff development for all categories of educators. School-based examples are used throughout the text to illustrate

how these skills apply to communication among students, school staff, administrators, parents, and members of the community.

What will you learn about effective communication by reading this book? You will find out what characterizes a competent communicator and effective communication. You will see how the way we communicate with others defines our relationships.

You will understand the communication process and learn ways to overcome inherent pitfalls. You will see that the way we use language and words can either facilitate or destroy effective communication. You will be able to recognize language that can set up barriers to successful communication. We use language to empower others, to overpower others, to erode our own power, or to create equal relationships—you will see how your choice of language and your flexibility in communication style can help you achieve your communication goals.

You will learn how healthy self-esteem is at the core of effective communication. Also discussed is the importance of perceptions—not only how others perceive you but how you perceive others. You will see how people's perception of communication may be more significant than actual communication. Factors that influence perception are described.

You will see how effective listening can tremendously improve the quality of your relationships and produce a more productive environment as well. You will learn how to become an effective listener and overcome listening barriers.

What we say nonverbally may be more important than what we say verbally. You will learn to become aware of what you are saying nonverbally as well as what others are communicating nonverbally.

You will see the importance of creating a supportive communication climate in the classroom, throughout the school, in meetings, or with members of the community. Behaviors that promote a supportive environment and reduce defensiveness are discussed.

Finally, conflict does not need to be a destructive force in relationships and organizations. When handled constructively, conflict may actually strengthen relationships. Guidelines for resolving conflict situations are discussed. You will learn about various styles of coping with conflict and situations for which each style is appropriate.

Keys to Communication

A Handbook for School Success

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In summary, this book covers the fundamentals of successful one-on-one communication for educators, regardless of their titles or positions. Use it as a personal guide in communicating with administrators, school professional and support staff, students, parents, and community members as well as a tool for staff development. Remember that effective communication skills cannot be developed overnight. It takes time, practice, and patience with ourselves and others. For many of us that may be a lifelong process, but most important is that we commit to the journey of becoming better communicators. It is a journey that will lead to tremendous personal and professional success. Bon voyage!

Communication: The Key to Organizational Success

Effective communication is important to the success of any organization—whether it is a public school, a Fortune 500 company, or a mom-and-pop store. An organization's leaders affect the communication climate (good or bad) that pervades the organization. Consequently, it is crucial that leaders at all levels in an organization have knowledge of effective communication, are able to apply those skills, and encourage effective communication throughout the organization.

To illustrate the importance of effective communication skills in the workplace, it is estimated that from 66% to 78% of a leader's time is spent communicating. Leaders highest on the organizational ladder spend even more time communicating. Their jobs often solely consist of communication with others. It is not surprising that the key to successful leadership is effective communication skills.

Employees in both the business world and school settings complain that the communication in their organizations is mostly top-down with no opportunity for discussion. They contend that the communication through these formal channels provides the least useful information. Relevant information is learned through the

grapevine. Teachers and other staff in the schools, like their counterparts in the business world, want more face-to-face communication with higher-ups in small-group settings, or one-on-one. They also would like to have their opinions sought and taken seriously.

Increasingly, these concerns by employees in business and professional staff in schools are being taken more seriously. In education, for instance, more attention is given to programs addressing areas such as school climate, school-based management, collaborative efforts, and teacher empowerment.

Effective communication is central for the administrator who wishes to involve various constituencies—school staff, students, parents, and community members. John Naisbitt (1982) said the effective educational leader must "be a facilitator rather than an order giver" (quoted in McKenzie, 1993, p. 2). This approach is consistent with managerial trends in business and industry. To apply this brand of management means implementing more informal, one-on-one forms of communication.

Defining Effective Communication

What is meant by effective communication? Communication scholars who have examined communication competence conclude there is no ideal way to communicate. Some effective communicators are serious, whereas others are humorous; some are outgoing, whereas other are more quiet; and some are straightforward, whereas others are indirect. Consequently, a variety of communication styles can be effective.

Effective Communication Is Situational

No one style of communication is appropriate for all situations. For instance, the humorous approach might work well in one setting but be offensive in another situation. Some situations may require straightforwardness, whereas other situations require an indirect approach. A competent communicator sensitively assesses the situation and then determines the appropriate communication approach. The situation defines the appropriate way to communicate.

An administrator may find herself in a variety of communication situations—with other administrators, school boards, principals, school staff, students, parents, or community leaders. The communication strategy will vary from group to group. The context may also vary. Is the administrator responding to concerns, inviting input, or conducting a meeting? Each of these contexts requires a different communication approach. It is important to assess each situation and then to determine the appropriate communication strategy.

Competence Has a Relationship Dimension

Competent communication means all parties are satisfied with the communication. Therefore, we can only judge a person's communication competence by determining if the needs of others are met as well. For instance, one program head was convinced he was creating an open and democratic department. However, he met with much resistance from his staff. He ultimately realized that although he mouthed staff involvement in meetings, he actually tried to influence staff members to accept his vision of curriculum change, rather than to incorporate their input. In the administrator's interactions with various constituencies (students, teachers, parents, and others), it is important to consider their needs in the communication process.

In summary, remember, the situation defines the most effective way to communicate, and communication competence is dependent on the communication needs of others being met as well.

Characteristics of the Effective Communicator

Although competent communication varies from one situation to another, communication scholars have identified several themes that characterize effective communication in most contexts.

Effective communicators are able to choose their actions from a repertoire of behaviors. Sensitive assessment of a situation will help one to choose which communication strategy would be most effective for a given

situation. It is important to consider the context, your goal, and the other person's goal and attitude when determining the appropriate behavior. Examine your communication goal. Is your goal to involve, persuade, empower, inform, or direct? Each goal necessitates a different communication strategy. By having a repertoire of communication behaviors, you will be able to use a communication strategy that considers the context, your goal, and the goal of the other person in a given situation.

Effective communicators have the best chance of successful communication when they understand the other person's perspective. For instance, by understanding the students' point of view, you will be more likely to communicate successfully with them. In some cases, you may have to second-guess the others' perspective, but when possible, you should invite the others' perspective. Not only does this give you valuable information about what's important to them, but it will help you communicate more effectively with them.

It is important to construct a variety of frameworks for viewing an issue. For instance, presuming someone doesn't care about an issue because he or she doesn't contribute in meetings could be risky. Other possible ways of framing the behavior may be that the person is afraid to speak out, doesn't know how to articulate his or her thoughts, or is shy in group situations. These alternative ways of framing give you more communication options when interacting with this person. Perhaps by seeking out the person in a one-on-one, nonthreatening setting, you can find out how he or she really feels. Similarly, someone who violently disagrees with you should not necessarily be viewed as the enemy but could also be seen as someone who greatly cares about the issue. Now you both have something in common—you both care about the issue. By reframing this as a common concern, you can begin to examine solutions together, creating a possible win-win situation rather than a win-lose scenario.

Self-monitoring allows you to observe your own behavior from a detached point of view. Consequently, you can continue or change behavior depending on how well it is working. For instance, if you are continually meeting with resistance, you may decide you may want to

soften your style and invite more input from others. Self-monitoring while communicating also helps you to stay focused on the communication strategy you have chosen. For instance, you are in a meeting with teachers to get their input on school policy. You suddenly find yourself doing most of the talking, thus dominating the discussion. If you are self-monitoring, you will realize this is happening, stop dominating, and reorient the discussion to actively include others.

When people care about a relationship, they tend to communicate better than when they don't. We may not like a colleague, but we must care about the professional relationship if we are to be effective in our jobs. You may not like all the parents, teachers, staff, students, principals, and others with whom you must work. However, you must care about your professional relationships with them if you are to successfully work and communicate with them.

Once you have chosen the most appropriate way to communicate in a situation, it is important to do it skillfully. Reading about effective communication skills and actually putting then into practice are worlds apart. To be competent, one must practice cultivating effective communication skills. Practice them on a daily basis, both personally and professionally, so that those skills become second nature to you. At first, you may feel self-conscious, if these skills are new to you. Eventually, the skills will feel familiar. Like any new skill—tennis, cooking, skiing—at first it feels awkward. In time, with practice, the new communication skills will feel comfortable.

In summary, communication competence means one possesses a repertoire of behaviors, understands the other person's perspective, constructs various frameworks for viewing an issue, uses self-monitoring, cares about the relationship, and practices effective communication skills.

Characteristics of Communication

Every message communicates both a *content* and *relational* message. The content, of course, is the information being communicated.

The relational message, on the other hand, communicates how we feel about the other person. Choice of words, tone of voice, body language, plus myriad other cues communicate the nature of the relationship.

The relational message communicates the degree of affection, control, or respect we have for the other person. For instance, you may communicate the same piece of information to several different people, but the relational message may differ depending on how you feel about each person. The warmth or lack of it in your use of words, your voice, and your body language will communicate the degree of respect and liking you have for that person.

Consequently, it is important to be aware of the relational messages you are sending. Sometimes you may be in a hurry or are feeling stressed and unknowingly communicate relational messages that suggest lack of respect or liking. If this becomes a pattern, others may interpret that you don't care about or respect them. If the majority of your interactions suggest that you care about and respect others, then they will forgive you for the occasional times when you are abrupt because you're hurried. They will be especially understanding if you explain that you are pressed for time right now but would be glad to talk with them later.

The relational part of our communication also indicates the degree of control or influence each has in the relationship. Relational messages can indicate control in two ways. *Decision control* revolves around who has the power to determine what will happen in the relationship. For example, the decision control dimension of the relational message may indicate who has the final say, the nature of the relationship, and when and how they talk. Again, these messages are communicated through word choice, tone of voice, and other body language. If you are striving to create a team environment, rather than a hierarchy, it is important to be aware of the decision control messages you are communicating. To empower others, it is important that they feel they can initiate discussion on various topics and that they are involved in decision making. Monitor your one-on-one communication to make sure you are inviting dialogue; mutually sharing decision making; creating a team, not a hierarchical setting; and not controlling when and how others have input. Creating a climate where others have direct access, lessening

regulation of communication, increasing responsiveness, and flattening the hierarchy will encourage partnership and input. Your role, then, becomes that of facilitator.

The other way influence or control is communicated in relational messages is through *conversational control*. Who controls the conversation? Some indicators of this are who talks the most, who interrupts whom, and who controls the topic of conversation. Again, to achieve a team and empower others, it is important to not dominate the conversation, control the topic, or interrupt others. Let others have their say and discuss matters important to them, and be sure to attentively listen. In this way, others will be empowered, and you will learn what is on their minds. It is also important as facilitator of the group process to not let other individuals dominate the discussions. Draw out those who may be reticent and (privately) remind those who tend to dominate that the goal of the group is to encourage everyone's input and involvement.

In summary, to empower others and create a team environment, it is important to monitor the types of relational messages that you communicate. Do your relational messages communicate care, respect, and equal control in interactions? Does the tone of the message invite the other to share in decision making? Do you control the conversation by controlling the topic, interrupting the other, and dominating talk time? If so, the other person will feel dominated and not empowered.

How Communication Indicates the Type of Relationship

The relational message of any communication indicates whether the relationship is *complementary*, *symmetrical*, or *parallel*. A complementary relationship exists when one person has more power than the other person. In complementary relationships, the dominant person controls the decision making and the conversation. This is the type of communication one might expect to hear between the boss and the employee or the teacher and the student. Subtle nonverbal cues alert you to the disparity in power. However, this form of communication control can be seen in seemingly equal relationships as well. Two colleagues may be equal in status, yet one may

conversationally defer to the other if he or she feels inferior or intimidated by the other.

In contrast, in symmetrical relationships both parties are equal in power in their interactions. Neither dominates the conversation, and decisions are made mutually. Examples of this would be discussions you have with your peers, in teams or committees. All parties have equal input and share in the decision making.

The final relational form, the parallel relationship, is a blend of the complementary and symmetrical relationships. Here parties handle power in more fluid ways. Partners shift their power depending on the situation. Each person leads in some areas and follows in other areas according to the situation and their respective abilities. However, overall there is a balance of control. Examples of this may also be seen in teams or committees. For instance, imagine that a team of school staff has been asked to examine school equipment needs and to explore equipment funding. One teacher has expertise on computers, and others defer to him or her in deciding which type of computers to purchase. Another teacher in the group has expertise on grant writing, and the group defers to him or her on writing the grant proposal for the equipment needs. Other teachers in the group may have additional areas of expertise so that the group defers to them on those issues. Here, you can see, power is fluid depending on the situation and each person's expertise.

By definition, the hierarchy of power in schools creates relationships that are complementary with unequal power. The administrator has areas of expertise and authority that other professional school staff do not possess. However, professional school staff also have their areas of expertise. To capitalize on the professional school staff's special abilities, it is important for the administrator to empower them by striving for communication that results in parallel relationships. At all levels of the school setting, every person, including the student, has expertise or special abilities or perspective in some area. Consequently, it is important to let parties handle power in fluid ways depending on the situation and their respective abilities. In schools implementing site-based management, all parties must feel like partners or a team with each person bringing a particular perspective or expertise.

To encourage widespread involvement, it is important that parallel relationships be nurtured. For instance, in restructuring efforts, all partners have something of value to offer. Administrators and other professional school staff are particularly knowledgeable because they are involved in the day-to-day workings of the school. Students also have a unique perspective that must be considered. Parents' and other community members' input is needed, and they must be involved in decision making for restructuring to work. Local business leaders understand the skills needed in the work world and have access to resources needed to support educational programs (Milstein, 1993).

Remember, your communication indicates the nature of a relationship. To empower others, strive for symmetrical and parallel relationships when you communicate.

Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed the importance of effective communication for successful organizations. I have defined effective communication and examined the characteristics of a competent communicator. We have seen that communication has both a content and relational message and that our communication indicates whether the relationship is complementary, symmetrical, or parallel. Understanding the characteristics of effective communication and realizing how communication defines our relationships can help you become a more astute communicator and an empowerer of others.

The Process of Communication

Communication in Action: Overcoming the Pitfalls

Encoding Problems

Communication begins when we translate our thoughts or feelings into a message. This process is known as *encoding*. When we encode accurately, our message mirrors correctly what we are thinking or feeling. However, as you have probably experienced, the end message may not always be exactly what we intended to communicate. Problems with encoding can lead to miscommunication. For instance, you may try to express your feelings to someone, but somehow the words come out wrong. This could happen because your emotions get in the way when you try to communicate. Or perhaps you haven't clearly identified your feelings to the extent that you can communicate them. In either event, it is important that you think through your feelings and determine how you can communicate them clearly.

Another encoding problem can occur when we haven't adequately thought about what we want to say. Here emotions may not interfere, but it may be more that our thoughts are disorganized and the resulting message is confusing. In this case, taking the time to or-

ganize your thoughts and deciding how and what to say can reduce misunderstanding.

A final encoding problem can occur when we lack sufficient knowledge or vocabulary to express ourselves accurately. Imagine trying to communicate with others who speak another language when you don't know the language. Whether their language is foreign (e.g., Spanish, Japanese) or jargon (e.g., automotive, computer, medical), if you don't possess the vocabulary or knowledge, it will be difficult to communicate in their language.

Being aware of potential encoding problems can help you determine ways to overcome them. Consequently, the message you intend to communicate is what you actually communicate.

Likewise, it is important to encourage and not to discount others who may have encoding problems. For instance, in a broad-based group discussing restructuring efforts, members may include students, community members, or support staff who are not accustomed to speaking publicly. People will vary tremendously in their ability to express themselves. However, just because someone is not articulate does not mean that what he or she has to say is not important. Nonetheless, the tendency will be to listen more to the input of those who express themselves well. It is important not to discount the messages of individuals who can't encode effectively. You can encourage individuals with encoding problems by probing or asking them questions and by paraphrasing what they have said. Doing this can help them in clarifying their own thinking and expression as well as making sure you understand their message. The following example illustrates how a facilitator of a broad-based group could encourage this student's clear input:

Student: We gotta make it so kids feel better about coming to school.

Facilitator: What do you mean by "feel better"?

Student: I dunno. I mean it just seems like kids feel like nobody cares what they think.

Facilitator: What are things we could do to find out what they think and let them know we care?

Student: Maybe make it so kids could meet in groups and discuss stuff that really bothers them about school.

Facilitator: And then would these groups summarize their concerns and bring it to a meeting like this?

Student: Yeah! Yeah! That's what I mean. They could elect a student from each group that would come to a meeting like this and tell what bothers students about the school and how to make it better!

Rather than just discounting the student's first statement that was poorly encoded, the facilitator encouraged, clarified, and probed until the student had clarified his own thinking and could express his thoughts more clearly.

Decoding Problems

The same problems in encoding that you or others experience as communication sender can be experienced by the person receiving the communication. This is called a *decoding* problem. His or her emotions may clutter the reception of the message. For instance, the student, teacher, or parent may perceive you, the administrator, as threatening and that consequently affects their interpretation of your explanation of school restructuring. Or perhaps the other person does not possess the knowledge or vocabulary to understand what you're saying. A prime example of this would be the student or parent who may be listening to your explanation of restructuring but who does not have the vocabulary or knowledge to make sense of the information. To alleviate decoding problems, it is important to be sensitive to the other person's perception of you and to explain information at a level he or she can understand.

Feedback

Many miscommunication problems can be avoided by making sure there is ample opportunity for *feedback*. If communication is primarily one way, the possibility of misunderstanding is much greater. Examples of one-way communication would be written communication (memos, newsletters, manuals, etc.) or meetings

where the leader does the talking and allows little opportunity for questions or dialogue. Although one-way communication is faster and can reach more people, it is inherently susceptible to misunderstanding. Two-way communication may take longer and reach fewer people, but it is more likely to be understood and effective. For instance, if your school is involved in restructuring, there must be an unrestricted flow of communication. Milstein (1993) notes the importance of regular feedback about restructuring activities and events.

> Planners often become so absorbed in activities that they fail to consider the needs of others who will have to participate in the results of planning. Without access to information, those not directly involved in planning may grow uneasy and become suspicious of planners' motives or of what will be expected when they have to implement the plans. Rumors tend to spread like wildfire in such situations. For these reasons, every effort should be made to keep all partners up-to-date on restructuring. Strategies include creating newsletters, making hotlines available, holding community meetings, putting on demonstrations, inviting interested parties to observe planning and implementation activities, and developing mechanisms such as suggestion boxes for individuals to initiate exchanges with planners. (p. 32)

Communication Channels

This leads to the next communication consideration, which is choosing the most effective *channel* to use for communicating. Is what you want to communicate best done one-on-one, in a small group, or in a public setting? Should you use written, spoken, or nonverbal communication? Using an inappropriate channel is a sure way to encounter miscommunication. For instance, in the above restructuring example, relying on only one channel—such as the written channel—could lead to misunderstanding. Written communication does not allow for clarification and questions. The reader may be left misinformed, confused, or suspicious unless he or she seeks clarification—which may or may not happen. The reader may not even realize he or she has misunderstood the written message.

Creating direct access through face-to-face communication—such as community meetings—can ensure dialogue and better communication. Using multiple channels of communication increases your chances of reaching people, ensuring that they understand you and allowing them their input. For example, relying only on community meetings may not reach everyone or ensure their feedback. Some people may not be able to attend, may not have the opportunity to speak up, or may not feel comfortable expressing their feelings publicly. For them, a smaller group situation, the hotline, suggestion box, or survey may be the best way to ensure their input.

Not only is it important to choose the most appropriate channel when communicating, but it is also important to be aware of *channel breakdowns*. Examples of channel breakdowns for written communication may be illegible handwriting, poor-quality copy, fine print, numerous grammatical/spelling errors, or an inefficient delivery system (e.g., the child loses the newsletter or the survey the parent is supposed to fill out). Such are some problems you may anticipate for surveys, newsletters, and suggestion boxes. Anticipating ways the written channel may break down will help you uncover ways to avoid or minimize these problems.

As for oral communication, channel problems can occur, for instance, because the speaker is hard to understand or hear, there is competing noise or activity in the background, or there is a poor-quality PA system. Channel breakdowns can be avoided or minimized if they are anticipated and accommodated. For example, plan meetings at a time and place without distractions and noise. Make sure that if the group and the room will be large, there are adequate roving microphones and a quality sound system. Likewise, for smaller group settings, consider meeting places that are comfortable and distraction free and that invite participation. Classroom settings with desks lined up in rows are probably not going to encourage the dialogue you'd like. If the classroom is the only available meeting place, then to encourage dialogue, be sure to circle the chairs to create a sense of unity and equality.

In summary, being aware of your own and others' encoding and decoding problems, incorporating feedback mechanisms, choosing the most appropriate channels for communication, and anticipat-

ing and accommodating channel breakdowns can help you overcome some pitfalls of communication.

Words That Confound Meaning

We use words to communicate our meaning to others; however, words can also *confound* meaning. When words interfere with communication we term this *semantic noise*. Some examples of semantic noise are (a) *abstract language* or *relative words*; (b) *jargon, technical language*, or *unfamiliar words*; and (c) *"red flag"* words.

First, abstract language is language that is open to a variety of interpretations. An example of abstract language might be *teacher empowerment*. This concept may have a variety of meanings for different people. Your definition of teacher empowerment may be different than another person's. Thus, although you both may be using the same word, the meaning for each of you may vary. To avoid problems with abstract words like teacher empowerment, use concrete descriptions that specify exactly what you mean, such as "teachers will be involved with hiring decisions and developing curriculum." Until you establish a common meaning of an abstract word like teacher empowerment, it is wise to use language that specifically defines the teacher behaviors you associate with the term.

Similar to abstract words are relative words. Again, these are words that have meanings that vary from person to person. Examples might be "We will create groups to discuss restructuring soon," "I'll have my recommendations to you shortly," and "We need several copies of the report." More precise would be "We will create groups to discuss restructuring within the next 2 weeks," "I'll have my recommendations to you within the hour," and "We need five copies of the report."

Because relative words are open to an individual's interpretation, numerous communication problems can occur. As with abstract language, it is important to use concrete, specific language instead of relative words when speaking. Ask for clarification when others use relative words with you. For instance, you might ask,

"When you say you will be implementing the changes soon, when exactly do you mean?" Remember, people have different meanings for the same words.

Jargon, technical language, or unfamiliar words are another way we can obscure communication. Every field has its own jargon. Those in the field may be familiar with the jargon; however, newcomers or outsiders may have no idea what the jargon means. Think of the jargon that may be common to school administrators but may be unfamiliar to your school staff or outsiders. Be sure to explain in lay language when you are unsure if the others are familiar with the jargon. For instance, in meetings with lay persons, such as students, parents, or community members, avoid using jargon or make sure you clearly explain the terms. Terms like *restructuring, site-based management,* or *teacher empowerment* may be familiar to the educator but unfamiliar to the average person.

Like jargon, technical language can interfere with communication. For instance, think of how your eyes glaze over when someone begins explaining in technical terms why your computer is not functioning properly (unless of course you are a computer buff familiar with the language). When possible, explain technical terms or processes in everyday language unless you know the other person understands the technical language. For instance, if you are explaining the school's new computer system to people unfamiliar with technical computer language, then be sure to limit and explain technical terms, and, whenever possible, use everyday language.

Unfamiliar words can also obscure communication. We have all had the experience of having to read and sign a legal document that we did not understand because of all the unfamiliar legal words. Perhaps you have read a memo from the intellectual who uses large impressive words such as *penultimate*. This word comes to mind as I once conducted a workshop for state employees who worked in manual labor jobs. Most of them did not have a high school diploma, yet their supervisor sent them memos using words like penultimate. Not only did the employees not understand what their supervisor was saying, they felt as if he was flaunting his education in their faces, knowing they lacked education. They were insulted and angered by his memos. Their supervisor had a sophisticated grasp of words, yet he was not effectively communicating with his

employees at their level. Whether in writing or in speaking, be sure to use language that can be understood by the people with whom you are communicating. Avoid words that may be unfamiliar to them.

Finally, "red flag" words can interfere with communication. Red flag words are words that produce an emotional reaction in listeners. Some groups may have common red flag words. For instance, for teachers some examples might be *teacher evaluations*, *cutbacks*, *lunchroom duty*, or *mandated curriculum requirements*. For community members, red flag terms might be *restructuring schools* or *school tax increases*. In other cases, individuals may have their own set of red flag words. For example, some women feel being called *girls* is condescending; other people may be offended by profanity. When people hear red flag words, their minds tune out or go off on a tangent. Effective listening and communication ceases.

What is important to remember is to avoid using red flag words, which you know irritate your listener, or profanity. Another option is to use words that say the same thing without using the red flag itself. For example, instead of *teacher evaluation*, say *faculty development process*. Sometimes describing the concept or process without using the red flag word will help keep your listeners from tuning out. For instance, if you are explaining restructuring to a group of people who you think will react negatively to the word, then explain the concept and its benefits without using the term *restructuring*. Wait to use the term until you feel the audience has accepted the concept.

In summary, abstract language, relative words, jargon, technical language, unfamiliar words, and red flag words create semantic noise that interferes with effective communication. The miscommunication that occurs because of these types of semantic noise can sabotage your efforts to communicate effectively.

Language That Empowers or Overpowers

Through a variety of subtle verbal and nonverbal cues we signal our power to others. As I will discuss in a later section, nonverbally we indicate our power or lack of power through our eye contact,

facial expression, voice, touch, space, dress, and the like. Verbally, our dialect, accent, pronunciation, language diversity, and speaking style give others clues about our social or professional status. This section will illustrate how language can empower others or overpower them.

Specific speaking styles are used by persons who have less power or wish to empower others in a particular setting. Such persons tend to speak in longer, less fluent sentences, defer to the other person, and elicit feedback. Persons with less power or those who wish to empower others tend to use many of the following speech forms when they speak (Bradac, Hemphill, & Tardy, 1981):

- *Qualifiers* are phrases such as "kind of," "I guess," "maybe," or "sort of" that can indicate the speaker lacks authority or conviction. However, qualifiers can also lessen the unkindness of a statement and show tentativeness.
- *Tag questions* are phrases that turn a declarative statement into a question by tagging a question onto the end of a statement. Example: "That was an interesting meeting, don't you think?" Tags may be used when a speaker does not have full confidence in his or her statement. Tags can also be used to encourage feedback from the other person.
- *Compound requests* are used by a speaker to cushion the request with extra wording, rather than making a simple request. For instance, "Drop that by my office" might become "You could drop that by my office, if you'd like." The wordier compound request softens the brusqueness of the former statement and appears more polite.
- *Polite forms* indicate a deference to or consideration of the other person. Examples: "Thank you for your time" or "Please call me later in the day."
- *Disclaimers* express uncertainty or soften a statement. Disclaimers are expressions that excuse, explain, or request understanding. Examples: "This may sound odd, but . . ." or "I could be wrong, but . . ."
- *Intensifiers* increase or emphasize the force of a statement. Examples: "very," "surely," "really," and "such."
- *Verbal fillers* are words or phrases that we use to fill in silences. Examples: "well," "okay," "right," "you know," and "uh."

- *Questions* can be asked to gain others' perspectives. Example: "How do you think we can get people at all levels involved?"

People perceive a speaker has less power and competence in a situation when he or she uses a large number of these speech forms. However, when used in moderation, many of these speech forms empower others and invite feedback.

In contrast, persons wishing to stress their power or status in a setting *seldom* use the above language forms. Instead, brevity, abruptness, and fluency characterize powerful speech, and their speech resembles commands. Examples: "Take this to the office," "Give me that paper," "I want it done by Friday," or "This is the curriculum you will use."

Although the powerful style may seem preferable if we are to be perceived as powerful, it has inherent flaws. The powerful style is authoritative and task oriented—best used by generals, despots, and old-style autocratic managers. It does not show concern for others. On the other hand, although the powerless style lacks confidence, it solicits involvement and shows regard for the listener.

Research indicates a blend of the powerful and powerless speech styles is viewed as most effective for a manager to use—creating both productive and satisfied employees. Interestingly, in research studies, the powerful speech style (when used by either a male or a female manager) was perceived to produce the least satisfied employees.

Consequently, communication researchers conclude that the speaking style of effective leaders must be flexible depending on the situation. Some situations may call for powerless speech when seeking to empower the other person; other situations require the use of powerful speech when establishing authority or taking command of an emergency situation; in other instances, a blended speech style may be useful for maintaining authority but also for encouraging input and, thus, empowering others.

In short, the speech style you use with others in the school setting may empower them, or it can establish you as the autocratic leader. Remember to analyze the situation. When do you need to be authoritative? When do you need to defer to others? When do you need to do a combination of the two?

In implementing site-based management, it is important for the principal to be aware of an accompanying change in language style. Obviously, the principal's role must be reconceptualized. The principal must go from being the authority figure to being the facilitator of partners with diffused power. The principal must learn to lead by empowering rather than by controlling. Many principals will need help making this role change (Milstein, 1993). As an authority figure, formerly the principal may have communicated to others using powerful language. Commanding others, not encouraging input, may have been the prevalent communication style. If the principal hopes to make the transition to the role of facilitator, he or she must begin to use more powerless and blended language that empowers others and often defers to them.

The following examples illustrate how powerless speech can empower others and encourage input:

- By using a tag question, a power statement such as "We should begin our restructuring by involving the community" could be turned into a statement that defers to others and invites a response: "We should begin our restructuring by involving the community, don't you think?"
- By using qualifiers, a power statement such as "We should start with the teachers and the staff" could be turned into a statement that also defers to others and invites input by saying, "Perhaps we should start with the teachers and the staff."
- By using compound requests, the power statement "Compile a list of community members to include on the restructuring teams and give it to me on Friday" would become "You may want to begin thinking about community members that you'd like to have on the restructuring team. If possible, could you get me a list by Friday, so we can start contacting people next week?"
- By using polite forms, the other person feels valued: "I want to thank you students for working with the restructuring team. Your insights were helpful."
- By using disclaimers, the power statement "Curriculum change should be done in a later phase of restructuring" would become more tentative and not intimidate others' expressions: "You may not agree with me, but I think the curriculum change should be done in a later phase of restructuring."

- By asking questions, others are empowered and encouraged to provide input: "How can we involve students in school decisions?"

Finally, two of the powerless speech forms mentioned earlier do not necessarily solicit others' involvement, nor do they show regard for the listener. They are intensifiers and verbal fillers.

Remember to assess the situation in determining whether to use language that is powerful, powerless, or a blend of the two. To be an effective communicator, one must be flexible in his or her use of powerful, powerless, or blended language forms. To empower others and create a team environment, it is important to use the powerless and blended forms.

Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed some of the pitfalls of communication. To avoid these pitfalls, I have discussed the importance of reducing encoding and decoding problems, ensuring feedback mechanisms, choosing the appropriate channel(s), being aware of channel breakdowns, avoiding words that confound meaning, and realizing that use of various speech forms can empower or overpower others. Addressing these pitfalls can help you become a more effective communicator.

Keys to Effective Communication: Accurately Perceiving Oneself and Others

Healthy Self-Esteem

A number of communication scholars describe *healthy self-esteem* as the key to effective communication. How we view ourselves affects our success at communication. Considerable attention has been given to the importance of healthy self-esteem for the effective development of children, but it is also important for adults. Adults' self-esteem is subject to damage or growth as well. Some self-esteem experts say that many of the systems in our society—ranging from family systems to organizational systems—perpetuate unhealthy behaviors and low self-esteem.

Professional and support staff in our schools often become casualties of damaged self-esteem because of institutionally created practices and structures. Although schools are encouraged to develop high self-esteem in their students, school administrators often overlook the importance of healthy self-esteem for the successful functioning of professional and support staff.

If professional staff are to feel good about their roles, administrators must identify those situations that are demoralizing, such as low salaries, isolation in the classroom, need for more professional contact, being overworked, shabby or no equipment, limited space, lunchroom duty, insufficient supplies, toilet and parking lot duty, and shortage of support staff. Such conditions, by their very existence, communicate to school staff the lack of regard that administration has for them as professionals. Administrators must first address these conditions if school staff are to function as professionals and possess high self-esteem.

Involvement in the development of curriculum and, in general, school procedures and policies can boost staff esteem and professionalism. Involving professional staff in meaningful decision making can be a way of empowering them and, in turn, enhancing their self-esteem. To bolster esteem, teachers and staff also need interaction with other professionals and programs that help them become more knowledgeable and confident. Involving school staff, students, parents, and community members in site-based management or restructuring activities can be an esteem booster for all parties.

One of the ways supervisors, administrators, and organizations affect the self-esteem of their employees is through communication of self-fulfilling prophecies. The classic research on the effects of teachers' expectations on students' performance has been found to be equally relevant to supervisor-employee relationships in organizations. If expectations are negative, then typically performance will be lacking as well. If expectations are positive, then results will be positive. Administrators and principals should embrace the philosophy that everyone can learn and grow. They must also be willing to provide the necessary resources and time to help school staff grow professionally.

In summary, to raise the self-esteem of school staff, principals must address those conditions that are demoralizing. Involving school staff in school decisions, creating a team environment, and providing professional development will develop professionalism and self-esteem.

Effects of Perception on Communication

Perception of communication behaviors may be more important than actual communication behaviors, according to studies in organizational communication. What this means, of course, is that we must be aware of how our communication is perceived. For instance, an administrator may intend to empower others through his or her communication, but the perception by school staff may be entirely different.

We must also be aware of how our own perception of others interferes with our communication with them. The stereotypes we hold and our perceptions may cripple our communication attempts. For instance, negative stereotypes of various school staff roles or persons can keep us from realizing that person's potential. An administrator may think that school bus drivers are no more than transporters of children—incapable of having a positive effect on children. Consequently, that administrator may not treat bus drivers as staff who really can have an impact on children. Another example might be gender stereotypes the administrator holds. The administrator may not take a female teacher as seriously as a male teacher. Everyone loses when our stereotypes or perceptions interfere with our communication. Valuable resources are wasted.

A number of factors influence our perception. The following factors affect perception (Adler & Towne, 1993):

Our motives affect how we perceive different people and events. We tend to perceive only what we want to see. If we do not like someone, we will probably view what they say or do with suspicion. If our motives are benevolent, then we may see others as good.

Past experiences color our interpretation of present events. For instance, if the school administration has traditionally not involved professional staff in decision making, then the administration's attempts to involve professional staff may make professional staff suspicious. Teachers in several schools were so accustomed to top-down management that it took a while for the teachers to believe they actually would be involved in decision making. At first, they thought it was only lip service by the administration to make teachers think they

were being involved. When a history of past experiences exists, it will take much time and reinforcement for people to perceive the present differently without assuming it is the same as the past.

Our assumptions about human behavior influence how we interpret people and events. For instance, an assumption held by some principals is that teachers are unwilling or unable to learn something new. We have all known people who see something good in everything and other people who see something bad in anything. The lens through which we view the world affects how we react to people and events. If you find yourself always seeing the negative in situations, it may be affecting your interactions with others as well as your perception of behavior and events. Building self-esteem and a positive attitude can help one become a constructive force.

Expectations are related to assumptions. If you believe that your supervisor is happy with your work, then you will not be threatened by his or her request for a classroom visit.

Knowledge affects our perceptions. If you know that a particular type of behavior is normal for 5-year-olds, then you will be able to deal with it as a developmental stage and not as a problem. Or if you know your colleague is under a great deal of stress, then you are less likely to view his or her curtness personally. As an administrator, if you realize that restructuring efforts may cause fearfulness in staff, then you will be able to anticipate their concerns and respond appropriately.

Personal mood and emotional state can affect perceptions of events. When you are in a great mood, even a negative encounter won't disturb you. However, if you are in a bad mood or depressed, even the smallest slight can be exaggerated into a major transgression. If you're stressed or upset, you will be more likely to attack other people for a small or imagined blunder. If you are feeling depressed, angry, or upset, try to avoid important encounters. The outcome will likely be unsatisfactory. In fact, try to keep a low profile until you are able to get your feelings under control. If others press you, tell them you would prefer to wait until later. Likewise, being

sensitive to others' moods and emotional states may help you to better understand their reactions or enable you to recognize times that may not be appropriate for discussing important issues.

People's senses vary tremendously and affect our perception of communication. What is loud to one person may be normal to another. Consider comments like, "She lets the kids in her class make so much noise, it drives me crazy. But the noise doesn't seem to faze her." Remember the scene in the movie *Dead Poets Society* when the headmaster of the school walks by Robin Williams's classroom and observes a lot of commotion? The headmaster presumed that learning could not be occurring in such pandemonium. However, just the opposite was true. The students were excited and challenged.

Age affects our perception. Age and one's accumulated experiences affect the way we view the world. If we have lived a few decades, we probably snicker as we recall how we viewed the world at various ages. Understanding how age affects our perceptions can help us to be more understanding of others of differing ages. However, we should not discount a person's views or ideas because of his or her age. For instance, youth can give us insight into their world and provide a fresh perspective and a simplicity that are sometimes lost as we make things more complicated than they are. The elderly, of course, give us the wisdom of age and experience. A perspective from any age has value.

Our physical state can affect our perception. When we are sick, affected by a bout of allergies, tired, or in bad health, we are more likely to see the world negatively and interact poorly. Also, other physical discomfort can affect our perceptions and communication. Think of the arguments that have started because everyone was hot, tired, hungry, and, therefore, grouchy. We give children "time-outs" to "cool off." We may also want to do the same for ourselves. If you don't feel well or are experiencing real physical discomfort, don't take on major decisions or encounters. Wait until you're more collected. Give yourself the break you need to recover and be able to communicate from a healthy state. Likewise, if you know that the

person with whom you are communicating is not feeling well physically, it may be wise not to attempt any important communication until he or she is feeling better. If physical discomforts prevail, try to alleviate them. For instance, if you have scheduled a meeting and the meeting room is uncomfortably hot, try to locate a cooler facility or keep the meeting short. Your chances of having a productive meeting will be greatly increased. The world and people seem much nicer when we feel better physically.

Cultural differences influence our perceptions. Every culture or subculture has its own worldview. Whether a person is from another part of the world or another part of the country, it is important to remember that cultural differences cause people to perceive behavior differently. For example, northerners may become annoyed with slow-moving, polite southerners. People who have lived in large cities may be accustomed to being very cautious in their interactions. Understanding someone's cultural background can help explain the way he or she communicates. For instance, communication that may seem normal to the northerner may seem rude and aggressive to the southerner. It is important to consider cultural differences and not let them interfere with our communication with others.

Social roles affect our view of the world. For instance, our perception of appropriate sex roles affects how we behave and expect others to behave. Historically, and currently in some areas, women have not been viewed as potential administration material. Typically, women are teachers (particularly at the elementary school level) and men are administrators. Because of the perception of what are "appropriate roles" for women, persons with excellent administrative potential may be overlooked. Consider the current number of men and women in administration, staff positions, or teaching positions at both the elementary and secondary levels. Few men enter elementary education because it is not consistent with traditional sex role expectations. It is important that you not let your perception of "appropriate" social roles interfere with your professional interactions with others.

The type of work we do also affects our perceptions of the world. Imagine the differing worldviews of the administrator and the custodian. Although it is important to realize that our job may affect our view of the world, it is important to remember that every person is more than just a job title. Various people in differing jobs contribute important perspectives.

We tend to categorize people, and although this may be useful for mental filing, it can be harmful for effective communication. Such stereotyping causes us to respond to our stereotypes and not to the person. For instance, what image comes to mind when you think of each of the following: bus driver, teacher, custodian, football player, honor student, parent? How do you think your stereotypes affect your interactions with each of these people?

For the principal, it is particularly important to pay attention to how you perceive and relate to various school staff roles. Some educators note that principal-teacher relationships may be so paternal and hierarchical that principals frequently dominate teachers in both in-school and out-of-school situations.

How do we keep our perceptual differences from interfering with our communication? Develop the ability to re-create or experience the world from the other person's point of view. We refer to this as empathy. The cognitive part of empathy attempts to understand the other's point of view. The emotional dimension of empathy allows us to feel what that person is experiencing.

Listening Effectively

Listening is often called the neglected part of communication. However, for effective communication to occur, listening must be at least half of the process. Poor listening skills are especially problematic when you consider that we spend more time listening than in any other communication activity.

Why don't we listen effectively? There are several reasons:

- Most of us are bombarded with so much communication that it becomes difficult to meaningfully listen to much of what we hear.

- Sometimes we don't listen because we are so preoccupied with our own thoughts, worries, or wishes. This is called *internal noise*.
- We may listen much faster than the average person speaks and therefore have time lags where our minds tend to wander.
- External noise or circumstances (noisy children, loud television, a crowded or stuffy room, or visual distractions) can interfere with effective listening.
- We may assume that what the other person is saying is too complex, simple, or boring to merit careful listening.
- We may erroneously believe that there is more to be gained by talking than by listening.
- We tend to presume that effective listening comes naturally because we have listened all our lives.

Research on the education setting indicates that principals and administrators create listening barriers in a number of ways. Attitudes may communicate messages such as "Let me tell you how it should be done," "Let me give you some advice," "Not now . . . later," "I'm the administrator paid to tell others what to do. I'm not a counselor," and "I'm too busy." Research suggests that supervisors make suggestions five times more often than they ask teachers for ideas. Additionally, perceptual problems can interfere with effective listening. Example: "She's only the bus driver. What can she possibly say that is important?"

To be an effective listener, avoid the listening traps mentioned above. Developing effective listening skills helps you become a better communicator and empowerer of others.

Active Listening

Although we may not be able to fully listen to every communication directed our way, there are times when we should listen meaningfully to others. This type of listening is termed *active listening*. Carl Rogers, noted psychotherapist, first coined the term active listening for the therapeutic setting (1986). He found that clients responded positively when he actively listened to them. In a sense, actively listening communicated to the clients that what they had to say was important and, in turn, that they, as individuals, were important. This validation helped to reinforce their worth as human beings as well as to help them clarify their own problems.

Active listening has been found to be useful in other contexts as well. Studies in industry have shown that when active listening is the norm in the workplace, employees are happier in their jobs, are more productive, feel more comfortable discussing problems, have greater trust in their coworkers and superiors, and feel better about themselves.

Similarly, active listening is important for other relationships as well—whether it's with a spouse, child, friend, colleague, or customer. Active listening is beneficial for creating trust, building others' self-esteem, assisting others to clarify their own thinking, helping others to feel less isolated, providing release for others' concerns, defusing the other person's anger, or merely comforting others.

Active listening is important in the school setting. It is important for school staff to actively listen not only to students but also at all levels of the organization. Active listening is particularly important if one is to become an effective school administrator. The least effective administrator is the one who issues directives but is not open to input. The administrator who is an active listener has his or her finger on the pulse of the organization.

Some of the reasons an administrator should actively listen are to (Hinds & Pankake, 1987):

- Learn information that will help them be better managers.
- Gain the respect and confidence of others—superiors, peers, and subordinates. By practicing effective listening, the administrator develops the reputation as a person who seeks and listens to the input of others.
- Gain information to make more effective decisions. As a result of seeking and listening to input from others, the administrator's database for decision making increases. The amount of information others are willing to share will expand with the administrator's willingness to listen. As greater trust develops, people feel more comfortable sharing.
- Enhance job performance. As more accurate information is shared, performance levels increase.

In summary, your ability to actively listen enhances your relationships with others, builds supportive climates, fosters high self-esteem in others, helps you be a better administrator, and builds productive environments.

Becoming an Active Listener

Some simple guidelines can help you become an active listener:

- *Stop what you are doing and give the speaker your undivided attention.*
- *Through your body language, let the speaker know you are listening.* Make eye contact, face the speaker, lean forward, and maintain an open body stance (don't cross your arms, for instance).
- *Prompt the speaker to talk* by using nonverbal encouragers, such as head nods and concerned facial expressions. Use verbal encouragers, such as "uh-huh," "really," or "tell me more."
- *Stay on the topic and don't interrupt.*
- *Ask questions that probe*, such as "How does that make you feel?" or "Why do you think that's so?" Questions or encouragers should be said with empathy, not in an accusing or interrogating tone. Listen without indicating disapproval.
- *Avoid distractions.* When possible, move to an area away from distractions. If that is impossible, set a later time when you can talk without interruption.
- *Paraphrase what the speaker says.* Paraphrasing helps the speaker know you are listening, clarifies for you and the speaker what he or she has said, and forces you to listen more carefully.
- *Be conscious of the speaker's nonverbal communication.* This helps you to read between the lines and respond appropriately. For instance, you may notice a disparity between what the speaker is saying verbally and nonverbally. If a student says, "Everything is fine," but the nonverbal suggests otherwise, you may want to gently probe deeper to get at what is really bothering him or her.
- *Keep an open mind.* By nonjudgmentally listening, you encourage the speaker to open up to you both now and in the future. You may not agree with what is said, but let the speaker have his or her say. You can respond with, "I understand why you may feel that way, but I see things differently." Then you can explain your perspective. However, you have validated the speaker and his or her opinion even though you may not agree with him or her.
- *Be aware of how emotions, attitudes, and perceptions interfere with listening.* Your own emotional reaction/perceptions may

interfere with your listening. If this happens, it may be wise to suggest talking later when your emotions have cooled down. Attitudes and perceptions, such as not being able to take the other person's view, may also interfere with listening. Here it is important to try to put yourself in the other person's place. Developing empathy and seeing the other person's point of view will prevent attitudes from interfering with your listening.

By applying the above active listening techniques, you will empower others and encourage their input.

Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed the importance of healthy self-esteem for effective communication and ways to enhance the self-esteem of teachers and staff. Also, the perception of communication may be more important than the actual communication. Understanding how perceptions can interfere with communication can help you overcome perception problems in yourself and others. Finally, listening empowers others, enhances esteem, builds a supportive climate, creates happier and more productive employees, and helps you be a better administrator. In concert, self-esteem, perceptions, and effective listening are keys for successful communication.

Nonverbal Communication: The Hidden Message

Nonverbal researchers claim that 93% of the emotional impact of a message comes from what we say nonverbally, whereas only 7% comes from the words said (Mehrabian, 1967). What we communicate without words may be more important than what we communicate with words. We tend to believe the nonverbal over the verbal. When someone weakly says, "I like the idea," more than likely we rely on what has been said nonverbally by the non-committal facial expression and unenthusiastic voice.

Functions of Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal communication serves several functions:

- *Repeats* what we say, such as shaking your head as you say, " I don't understand."
- *Substitutes* for words, such as nodding your head instead of saying yes.
- *Accents* what you say, such as using hand gestures to emphasize your speech.

- *Complements* what you say by indicating your attitude toward the other person. For instance, you may be explaining to a teacher how a policy will work, but your body language will communicate how you feel about him or her.
- *Regulates* the flow of conversation. For example, two people in a conversation will unconsciously send and receive turn-taking cues through their body language and vocal changes.
- *Contradicts* the spoken word. For instance, a teacher may say, "I agree with you." However, his or her body language may indicate otherwise.

Being aware of the functions of nonverbal communication will help you to be more conscious of your own and others' nonverbal messages.

Nonverbal Communication in the School Setting

Awareness of nonverbal communication is important for all personnel in the school as both senders and receivers of messages. As a sender, you must be aware of the positive or negative feelings toward others that you communicate nonverbally. You also must be sure that your nonverbal messages do not contradict what you say. If your body language says disapproval, but your words say approval, then the other person will be confused. The other person will most likely rely on the nonverbal message but have continued doubt about how you really feel.

As a receiver of communication, you need to become aware of nonverbal cues to understand what is really going on with others. Acuity in nonverbal communication is like having a special sensor that allows you to know when things are going well or when something is amiss. For instance, if you sense a discrepancy between someone's verbal and nonverbal expression, then you may want to probe for what he or she really feels. Being nonverbally sensitive makes you more responsive to other people's moods or feelings as well. For instance, sensing that someone is depressed or perturbed would allow you to be responsive to him or her. Consequently, through your empathy or willingness to talk, you empower the person and also strengthen the relationship.

Types of Nonverbal Communication

How do we communicate nonverbally? There are several ways we use nonverbal communication.

Body Orientation

Body orientation is how you position your body, feet, and head in relation to the other person. Body orientation can communicate how people feel about one another. For instance, if you don't want to talk with someone or don't like him or her, you will probably position your body away from that person. When we are comfortable speaking to others, we usually face them. Notice your body orientation when speaking to others. What messages are you conveying to them? To indicate you like and respect others, face them when you talk with them.

Posture

Posture can give insight into how you are feeling. If you are bored, tired, or despondent, you may tend to slump. Good posture is associated with confidence and enthusiasm. However, a person with stiff posture may be perceived as being rigid or inaccessible. Posture also indicates how tense or relaxed we are. In nonthreatening situations, we take on relaxed postures. When threatened, we tend to become tense. Be aware of what your posture communicates to others. Also, notice others' posture when you communicate with them. The other person's posture can give you clues on how he or she is feeling. Does he or she seem tense, relaxed, depressed, or confident? This insight can help you be more responsive to the other person's feelings.

Posture can also be a clue to detecting status differences between people. The lower status person is usually the more rigid, tense-appearing one. The higher status person assumes a more relaxed posture. However, some bosses never relax, and their posture shows it.

Gestures

When we are animated and comfortable in conversing, we tend to use gestures. Lack of gesturing may indicate boredom, sadness, or low enthusiasm. Fidgeting gestures can also reveal when someone is uncomfortable. An awareness of our own and others' gestures may give us insight into how people are feeling in situations.

Facial Expressions

Facial expressions are one of the most obvious cues as to one's attitude. Notice others' facial expressions when talking with them. What do their facial expressions tell you? It is also important to understand that sometimes people mask their emotions by not using facial expression, whereas others may exaggerate facial expression to belie their real feelings. An example would be a person acting excited about something when he or she is really not interested. Such artificial facial expressions make it harder to detect how other persons really feel; however, their other nonverbal cues may leak their true feelings. Again, when you sense contradictions in verbal and nonverbal communications, it may be wise to gently probe deeper.

The Eyes

The eyes are one of our most meaningful ways to communicate nonverbally. Our eyes can communicate a variety of messages—our emotions, our involvement, our attitude, our status. Our eyes communicate if we feel happy, sad, confused, frightened, interested, or bored. Taking time to notice what others are communicating with their eyes can help you understand how they are feeling. Then you can respond accordingly.

When we make eye contact with others we communicate interest and confidence. If we fail to make eye contact when speaking with others, it may communicate disinterest or lack of confidence. Making eye contact when communicating with others is important for making them feel validated or confirmed. It's a simple way of empowering them. It's important to note that in our culture, the person speaking is not expected to make continuous eye contact. He or she may occasionally look up or away to gather his or her thoughts.

However, in our culture, when one is listening, he or she is expected to maintain eye contact. This is not always the norm for other cultures and subcultures. For some cultures and subcultures, making eye contact may be perceived as being confrontational or insubordinate. For instance, in some very traditional cultures, women, as a sign of their inferior status, are expected to avert their gaze when communicating with men. Making eye contact would suggest the woman is challenging the man. In some American subcultures, males may avoid eye contact as eye contact is viewed as being confrontational. Respecting and understanding cultural and subcultural differences in eye contact can avert potential communication problems.

Eye contact also can indicate dominance or submissiveness between persons. A common scenario is the boss with unquestioning authority who does not make eye contact when he or she speaks to a subordinate. However, the subordinate is expected to maintain eye contact while the boss speaks. As an administrator striving to empower others, remember to make eye contact when communicating with them.

Voice

The old adage, "It's not what you say but the way you say it," is true. Our tone of voice and word emphasis can vary the meaning of a message. Imagine how you would vary your tone of voice and word emphasis to communicate either boredom, enthusiasm, or sarcasm for the following statement: "That was an interesting meeting." The meaning can vary tremendously depending on your tone of voice. Through tone of voice we can communicate interest, disinterest, warmth, coldness, sadness, happiness, confidence, uncertainty, openness, lack of openness, snobbishness or superiority, and other attitudes. For instance, one administrator was secretly ridiculed by his colleagues because of his snobbish tone of voice and use of large, elegant words. Few people liked him or got to know him because his tone of voice and choice of words exuded a sense of superiority.

Other ways the voice communicates are through volume, pauses, speed, and disfluencies. Someone who always speaks loudly may

be perceived as aggressive or offensive. A person who speaks softly may be seen as not confident. Pauses can be used to emphasize certain points. Someone who speaks very slowly or uses numerous disfluencies, such as "uh" or "well," may be perceived as not confident or competent. A person who speaks very quickly may be seen as curt. To be an effective administrator wishing to empower others, be aware of the tone of voice you use when communicating.

Touch

Touch has been shown to be important for the physical and mental well-being of both adults and children. Nonthreatening touch can form warm connections between people—professionally and personally. However, touch can be ambiguous. Is a touch on the shoulder a friendly gesture, a sexual advance, or an attempt at domination? Touch is important but must be used carefully. If the touch is clearly perceived as nonthreatening, it can be encouraging, comforting, and caring. As an administrator, it is important that you are careful in your use of touch. Your intended touch may be innocent; however, others may not perceive it as such.

Touch can also indicate status differences. Persons with higher status may touch lower status persons, but lower status persons may not touch the higher status person. For example, it's okay for the boss to put his hand on the arm of an employee, but the employee would not likely feel comfortable putting his or her hand on the arm of the boss. Again, because of possible sexual or status messages that may be construed by others whom you touch, be cautious in your use of touch in the work setting.

Appearance and Clothing

We make assumptions about people based on their clothing and appearance. We show more respect and respond more positively to well-dressed people. However, our assumptions based on clothing are not always correct. As we gather additional information about people, their clothing becomes less of a factor in our assessments of them. Try not to let others' clothing or appearance interfere with your communication with them.

On the other hand, remember that others may base their perceptions of you on your clothing and appearance. One school administrator, who was particularly tall, always made it a point to sit or lean over when talking with other people to come down to their level. He was aware that his position coupled with his height could cause him to be perceived as intimidating. Another teacher, who was particularly short, made it a point to stand when speaking to superiors who were seated, so that she would have more credibility. One teacher, striving to create an informal, interactive class, chose to wear informal clothing to facilitate her goal. This reduced the perceived status difference between herself and her students. More formal clothing is usually associated with more formal interaction. Consider your communication goal when choosing how you will dress and present yourself.

Space

The space between ourselves and others can be a barometer of the nature of the relationship. We can facilitate warmer, less formal relationships by decreasing the space between ourselves and others. Space that is too intimate, however, can be perceived as threatening when motives are unclear. In short, the less the distance, the more intimate and informal the relationship. The farther the distance, the more formal and impersonal the relationship. One's culture or personality can affect the perception of space. Some people are more reserved and prefer more space. Respect their preference. People in some cultures, such as our own and the British, typically keep their distance when communicating with others. Other cultures, such as Mediterranean or Latin cultures, communicate with little space between themselves and others. It is important to respect and understand cultural differences in space. Don't be offended if someone from another culture stands very close to you when speaking. He or she is not trying to invade your space; that is merely what feels normal for that person.

As an administrator, it is important to consider space for one-on-one encounters, small-group settings, and large public meetings. If you wish to create a warm, informal environment that allows people

to feel comfortable interacting, then reduce the amount of space between yourself and others. For instance, one administrator always held meetings with the faculty in a large auditorium. He stood in the front of the auditorium, and faculty (just like students in class) retreated to the back rows with huge open spaces between the administrator and the faculty. The spatial arrangement was not conducive to two-way communication. Consequently, communication was formal and mostly one way. Those faculty who did have the courage to speak up felt like they were making a formal public presentation. The meeting climate could have been greatly enhanced had the administrator chosen a smaller facility where people were closer to one another and the administrator. A smaller room would have created a more informal environment and facilitated dialogue.

Territoriality

Territoriality is a geographical area for which we assume some right. Examples would be your office, your phone, or your desk. Generally, we have more respect for the territory of higher status people and grant them more privacy. For example, the teacher would certainly knock before entering the principal's office. In contrast, the principal may not knock before entering the teacher's class (because of his or her lower status, the teacher may not even have an office or must share one with others). To create an environment that suggests equality, it is important that professional and support staff are treated with the same respect as administrators. When possible, make sure professional staff have office space. Be sure to respect others' territory whether it's the teacher's classroom, a secretary's desk, or the custodian's closet. One lunchroom worker complained that when she was away from her meal-planning desk, others would sit on it, clutter it with mugs and soda cans, and move her materials. When she came back to continue her work, she first had to clean the mess others had made and then try to find her paperwork and materials, which were usually scattered.

Physical Environment

Physical environment, such as architecture, interior design, furniture arrangement, and quality of furnishings, affects our com-

munication. Some environments invite us to relax, whereas others cause us to feel stiff and formal. It is important to be aware of the messages the physical environment of your school communicates—both inside and outside. If your school is not inviting, attractive, and comfortable, think of ways to make it more so. Get students, staff, parents, and community members involved. If budgets are tight, be creative. Find businesses and people to donate supplies, time, shrubbery, or other needed materials. Get everyone involved in the beautification process. The group effort will build cohesiveness, self-esteem, and pride. Students, staff, parents, and community members will be proud of their accomplishment and themselves for their good work. The effort also will give staff and students a sense of ownership in the school and an attractive environment that they find pleasing. Most likely, the level of productivity will go up for both students and staff. Research suggests that people's attitudes are affected by the attractiveness of their environment.

Physical environment also can communicate messages about status. The person with greater status typically has more space with finer furnishings. You can usually identify one's status in an organization by the size, place, and furnishings of his or her office. Think about office differences among your school staff. Support staff may not have offices or work stations, which, in itself, communicates their status in the organization. Professional staff probably have offices or some sort of work space. However, status differences can be detected. One clue is whether the work area is private or public. Public areas are accessible by outsiders or other employees and suggest low status for the occupant. Examples would be the receptionist's area; a work space shared by a number of employees; and an employee assigned to a room that is often used by others as a work space or social space because resources, equipment, the copier, or the coffeemaker are there.

Other status clues are: Is the work space shared with others or does it house a single dweller? Does the room have ample space? Does it have windows? What are the window treatments? Is the floor covering institutional tile or fine carpet? Are the furnishings of quality wood or institutional metal? What are the colors of the walls, flooring, and furnishings? Are colors predominantly institutional (white, gray, or beige) or are they cheerful and attractive?

A final aspect of physical environment to consider is arrangement and type of furnishings. To be an effective administrator, be sure your office arrangement and furnishings invite others to feel comfortable and interact. Do not use your desk as a barrier between yourself and others. Arrange your desk against a wall so you can swivel away from your desk and communicate with others without the desk barrier. Or have a conversation area in your office. When others come into your office, you can come out from behind your desk and sit with them in the conversation area. This arrangement creates the most egalitarian environment.

In other areas of the school, be sure meeting areas have movable tables and chairs. Round tables create the most egalitarian climate. Avoid the regimental lined-up chairs or desks motif. It does nothing to facilitate effective communication—either in meetings or in the classroom.

In short, attentiveness to the physical environment of the school can have a real impact on people's attitudes and behavior.

Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed the importance of nonverbal communication and how it functions. I examined the various types of nonverbal communication—body orientation, posture, gestures, facial expressions, eyes, voice, touch, appearance and clothing, space, territoriality, and physical environment. From the discussion, you can see why nonverbal communication plays such an important role in our interactions with others.

To be an effective administrator, it is important to be aware of the nonverbal messages that are intentionally or unintentionally being sent by you, others, and the school environment. This awareness can give you the opportunity to use nonverbal communication to create a positive climate that empowers everyone.

Creating Constructive Communication Climates

Communication Climate

Communication climate refers to the emotional environment in which people interact. What makes a communication climate either positive or negative? Simply put, the tone is largely shaped by the degree to which the people believe themselves to be valued by one another. *Confirming messages*, which convey valuing, occur in positive communication climates. In contrast, *disconfirming communication*, which shows a lack of regard for the other, occurs in negative communication climates.

Supportive vs. Defensive-Producing Climates

Jack Gibb (1961) isolated behaviors that create either a *supportive communication climate* or a *defensive-producing climate*. Using supportive behaviors and avoiding defensive ones will increase your chance of creating positive communication climates. Gibb's categories of defensive and supportive behaviors are as follows:

- *Evaluation vs. description.* Evaluative behavior is communication that takes on an accusing or judging tone. It often puts the blame on the other person and is characterized by using "you" language. Example: "You never try to improve your teaching." In contrast, descriptive communication explains the effects of the behavior on the speaker without judging the other person's behavior. Instead of "you" language, descriptive communication uses "I" language. Example: "When I see you're not including some of the new teaching methods we discussed, it makes me wonder if you're willing to develop yourself professionally."
- *Control vs. problem orientation.* Controlling communication occurs when one person seems to be imposing a solution on the other. Whatever the situation, people who act in controlling ways create a defensive climate. Controllers communicate that others' ideas are not valuable and that nothing they can say will change their thinking. The unspoken message is that "I know what's best." In contrast, problem orientation communication focuses on finding a solution that satisfies the need of both parties. The goal is not to win but to find mutually satisfying solutions.
- *Strategy vs. spontaneity.* Strategy, here, is synonymous with manipulation. No one likes to feel as if he or she has been manipulated. This can make others become defensive very quickly. In contrast, spontaneity means expressing yourself honestly. Spontaneity does not imply that you don't plan what you want to say, but that you do speak candidly.
- *Neutrality vs. empathy.* Neutrality invokes defensive behavior because it shows indifference for the other person. On the other hand, empathy promotes supportive communication because it strives to understand the other person's perspective.
- *Superiority vs. equality.* Nothing can create a defensive climate faster than someone who is acting superior. Individuals who act superior communicate that they don't want to relate on equal terms with others. Gibb found that many people of superior skills, talents, and authority are capable of projecting feelings of equality. Even though there may be status differences or class distinctions, such people see others as having just as much worth as human beings and treat them with equality.

- *Certainty vs. provisionalism.* If you know someone who is always right or always knows the way something should be done, then that person is probably guilty of the defensive-arousing behavior called certainty. Persons who are dogmatic about their own opinions and will not acknowledge others' opinions cause others to react defensively. In contrast to dogmatic communication is provisionalism. Here, people may have strong opinions but will also acknowledge other points of view.

Communication Climate for Effective School Relations

A number of educators have discussed the importance of creating a supportive environment for effective teacher-principal communication. They emphasize the importance of building trust, creating open dialogue, and accepting different worldviews. Research on school climate found that a school climate of supportiveness encourages school staff to share professionally and personally. Further, when teachers perceive their principals as closed, they shy away from principals' efforts to involve them in collaborative school efforts. However, when an open climate exists in the school, teachers in conferences with supervisors say they learned about themselves and feel the conference was productive. In contrast, in schools with a closed climate, teachers perceive the principal as trying to dominate, creating a sense of superiority, and seeming to have the only right answer.

In summary, to be an effective administrator, strive to create an open, supportive climate in your interactions with others and throughout the school.

Handling Conflict Effectively

Conflict Defined

If I asked you what you think of when you hear the word *conflict*, your images would most likely be negative. Most people think of conflict as something bad that should be avoided. However, this is not necessarily true. Conflict is natural. Conflict itself is not negative, but the ways we handle conflict can make it negative.

Let's begin with a definition of conflict.

> Conflict is an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce rewards, and interference from the other party in achieving their goals. (Adler & Towne, 1993, p. 361)

Looking at this definition more closely will help you understand the nature of conflict.

Expressed struggle. A conflict can exist only when both parties are aware of a struggle. The conflict may be expressed verbally or nonverbally (dirty looks, silent treatment, avoiding each other). However, both parties are aware that a problem exists.

Perceived scarce rewards. Conflict can occur when people perceive they are being shortchanged. Such conflicts could arise about limited time, money, or attention received. Some school-related examples might be battles about how a scarce school budget is going to be allocated; teachers feeling they must fight over limited resources, such as equipment, teachers' aides, or guidance from the principal; or teachers/students frustrated by large classes where the teacher does not have much time to spend with individual students.

Interdependence. Parties in conflict may not want to admit it, but they are dependent on each other. The actions of one affect the other. Consequently, parties must realize they need each other to solve the problem. By reframing the situation so that parties acknowledge their interdependence, they can begin to work together toward a mutually satisfying solution. For instance, in a school with tight budget constraints, professional staff can work together creatively and positively to help everyone get what they need. Solutions might include supplementing the teacher aide shortage by enlisting parent volunteers and finding alternative ways of funding equipment and program needs through local businesses or community programs.

Conflict Can Be Beneficial

If we handle conflict in negative ways, then the results can be detrimental to relationships. Studies on conflict show that certain behaviors can harm relationships. Relationships are harmed when each party defends him- or herself and is not problem oriented, fails to listen carefully to others, has little or no empathy for others, uses evaluative "you" language, and ignores others' relational messages (Adler & Towne, 1993).

In contrast, relationships can actually benefit if constructive conflict-coping strategies are used. People who handle conflict constructively use perception-checking skills to find out what the other is thinking; let each other know that they understand the other side; and admit to being defensive if they are, but then focus on solving the problem (Adler & Towne, 1993). Relationships that constructively weather conflicts are actually strengthened and deepened.

Styles of Coping With Conflict

There are five styles of coping that people typically use in responding to conflict: accommodation, avoidance, compromise, competition, and collaboration. Each of these styles can be beneficial in some instances and disastrous in other situations. All of the styles of coping with conflict can be explained by their relative use of cooperation and assertiveness. The following descriptions illustrate how each style is rated for cooperation and assertiveness and when each style is appropriate and inappropriate.

Accommodation

The accommodation style is characterized by one person giving in to the wishes of another. This style is high in cooperativeness but low in assertiveness. The person using this style is eager to be cooperative but may not be assertive about his or her own needs. This style can be particularly detrimental to someone if this is the predominant means of solving conflict. Individuals who continually ignore their own needs and always put the other person first

will eventually become resentful and experience low self-esteem. They will feel like the proverbial doormat.

However, there are instances when the accommodation style may be beneficial. If the conflict is minor and short-lived, or the issue or person is unimportant to you, then the accommodation style would be useful. Some examples will illustrate. Your colleague who is normally pleasant is short with you today, but you let it pass, knowing that she is having some personal problems this week. Others are debating about where to hold the annual school picnic. You really have no strong feelings and tell them whatever they decide is fine.

Finally, you may choose the accommodation style if the danger of speaking up is too great. For example, you may not assert yourself if it means getting fired from a job or risking physical harm.

Avoidance

Avoidance of conflict can take several forms: physically avoiding the person with whom you have conflict, changing the topic if the issue surfaces, and joking or denying a problem exists. People who avoid conflict believe it is easier to put up with a problem (hoping it will go away) than to face it and try to solve it. The avoidance style is low both in cooperativeness and assertiveness. The avoider does not attempt to cooperate with the other person and is not assertive about his or her own needs.

Using the avoidance style can be problematic if the issue is important to one or both of the parties. When the problem is avoided, it continues to fester, the parties become resentful, and they grow further apart. If one uses avoidance as his or her predominant conflict-coping style, he or she is not likely to develop deep relationships, may feel lonely and alienated, and may experience lowered self-esteem.

On the other hand, situations may arise where avoidance is the most pragmatic approach. If the problem is minor and short-lived, you may choose to avoid it. For instance, two school staff members have a minor disagreement; the principal may decide to avoid getting involved and let them work it out on their own. Or a teacher who is usually very responsible may forget to do something, and

you may choose not to mention it. If emotions run high, you may want to avoid talking about a problem until both of you are calm enough to talk about it rationally and calmly.

Compromise

In compromising, both parties give up some of what they want to reach a truce. Compromising shows a moderate level of assertiveness and cooperation. Both sides are assertive in trying to meet their own needs but are also cooperative by working with the other to meet the other's needs as well.

Compromise is appropriate when the parties' goals are incompatible. For instance, if some parents feel the school should be a place for students to develop life skills, and other parents feel the school should focus only on developing intellectual skills, then those goals are incompatible. Some sort of compromise must be reached where each side gives in to some extent. Another example: When a school is faced with a tight budget, all teachers have to compromise and give up some of what they would like to have.

The drawbacks of compromising are that there are some ethical or moral standards on which we should not compromise. For instance, if a principal compromises on an ethical issue important to him or her to resolve a conflict, then that principal will certainly suffer loss of self-esteem and may commit an injustice to those he or she serves. Additionally, using compromise as the predominant form of coping with conflict means that no one ever gets what they really want. Everyone ends up feeling somewhat shortchanged.

Competition

The competition style of coping with conflict is when one demands that his or her needs be met. The competition style is high on assertiveness but low in cooperativeness. Individuals using the competitive style fight until they get their way and will not work with the other to find a solution.

The competition style may be appropriate to use if one person feels very strongly about a situation or if it is an ethical or moral issue. For instance, a principal may believe that involving teacher/staff in decision making is important, and he or she may refuse to

let upper administration dictate the way the school will be run. Another time the competition style may be the best strategy is if you have expertise on an issue that others do not possess. For example, if you are the only reading specialist in a school, then your idea of a successful reading program should prevail. Similarly, a teacher may have to impose his or her authority over students as to what is unacceptable behavior in that classroom.

Using the competition style can obviously have disastrous effects in some situations. In instances where all parties have a heavy stake or expertise, one person should not try to impose a solution. This is, of course, what is at the core of school-based management. If the principal imposes his or her own solution on an issue important to teachers and staff, then they are unlikely to accept the decision and may harbor resentment. Someone who uses the competition style as the primary method of dealing with conflict will be seen as a controller who does not care about the needs of others. Such a person may be viewed as power hungry and will most likely be met with implicit or explicit hostility.

Collaboration

Collaboration is when parties work together to resolve a conflict so that everyone gets everything they want. The collaboration style is high in both assertiveness and cooperation. In the collaborative style, all are assertive about having their own needs met, yet they are cooperative in making sure others' needs are met as well. Collaboration works best when parties have a common goal but differ on how to attain that goal.

In collaboration, everyone comes out a winner. Everyone is empowered and self-esteem is enhanced. For instance, in a school setting, all parties may agree that the welfare of the student is their primary goal. However, they may differ as to the means of achieving that goal. What is important is that parties remain focused on the primary goal in resolving their differences. For instance, I may believe that communication skills are the most important thing for students to learn if they are to function effectively. However, you may believe that getting a basic education is the best way to serve students. If we both agree that the students' welfare is most impor-

tant, then I will support your efforts to make sure they get a good basic education, and you will support my efforts to make sure students learn to communicate effectively. Both of us win.

The collaborative style allows all parties to win and creates a supportive climate. However, it is time-consuming, and some unimportant issues do not merit the time it takes to come to a collaborative decision. The collaborative style is best to use when all parties have issues that are important to them. However, if goals are not compatible, then collaborative efforts will fail.

In summary, you can see no one style of coping with conflict works for every situation. There is no universal best way to resolve conflict. Conflict management experts agree that persons who best cope with conflict are those who can assess the situation, determine the appropriate conflict strategy, and comfortably use whichever of the five conflict-coping styles is appropriate for the situation. Situational flexibility and a repertoire of conflict-coping styles are the key.

Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed the importance of creating a positive communication climate in the school. I have also examined strategies for producing supportive communication environments. You have seen that conflict is natural and can be beneficial if constructively managed. I have examined the various styles of coping with conflict and discussed their relative merits and drawbacks for various situations. Situational flexibility and a repertoire of conflict-coping styles are essential to successfully managing conflict.

In Closing

The following pages summarize the points covered in this book. To empower others, it is essential that the school administrator be an effective communicator. To become a better communicator, remember to apply the basics of effective communication discussed here.

- *A variety of communication styles can be effective; what is most important is that communication be appropriate for the situation.* Consequently, this requires that you have a repertoire of communication behaviors. A competent communicator considers the situation, his or her goal, and the other person. It is important to understand the other person's perspective to be able to construct a variety of frameworks for viewing issues and to monitor the effectiveness of one's own communication.
- *Verbal messages have both a content and relational message.* The relational message indicates the degree of liking, respect, and control each has in the relationship. Two types of control are revealed by the relational message: decision control and conversational control. An administrator may empower teachers through relational messages, which communicate that teachers are liked, respected, and share decisions and conversational control with the administrator. It is also important to empower teachers by striving for communication that results in parallel relationships. Here parties handle control in fluid ways according to the situation and their respective expertise.
- *Semantic noise occurs when words become barriers to effective communication.* There are three types of semantic noise. First, abstract language and relative words may have different meanings for different people. Second, jargon, technical language, and unfamiliar words can confound communication. Finally, red flag words will cause an emotional reaction in the listener. The miscommunication that can occur as a result of semantic noise can sabotage your efforts to empower others.
- *The speech style of effective leaders should be flexible.* In some situations, a powerful style may be needed. Other times, when deferring to another, a speech style lacking power should be used. Finally, in some instances, a blend of styles may be useful, indicating status but encouraging input from others.
- *To empower school staff, it is important to regard their self-esteem.* Structures, practices, and conditions that demoralize school staff should be addressed. Being involved in decision making, being treated as professionals, and having professional development programs can boost staff self-esteem. Finally, one of the ways supervisors, administrators, and organiza-

tions can affect the self-esteem of their employees is through communication of positive self-fulfilling prophecies.

- *Communication is affected by our perceptions.* It is important for you as an administrator to be aware of how your communication behavior is perceived. Your communication may be perceived differently than intended. Similarly, you will be able to communicate better if you understand the other person's perceptions and points of view. Also, it is important to be aware that your own perceptions may affect your interactions with others. As the administrator, it is particularly important for you to pay attention to how you perceive and relate to various school employees, students, parents, and community members.
- *Actively listening to others empowers them and our relationships with them.* Listening helps solve problems, creates trust, gains information, defuses anger, helps others feel less isolated, builds others' self-esteem, and creates a more productive work environment.
- *Nonverbal messages have greater impact than words.* Nonverbal communication can suggest one's status, interest, affection, emotions, and attitude. Nonverbal messages are important for the administrator as both sender and receiver of messages. As sender, the administrator needs to be aware of the nonverbal messages he or she is sending. As receiver, the administrator can be more in tune with teachers and others by being sensitive to and responding to nonverbal cues.
- *Finally, if the above communication basics are applied, then you have probably created a positive communication climate.* Additionally, you can facilitate a positive communication climate by applying Gibb's (1961) guide to behaviors that produce supportive responses. Positive communication climates are characterized by messages that confirm and value the other. A positive, supportive environment is important for effective school communication, school involvement, and empowerment of people. Conflict, when handled constructively, can be beneficial. There is no one best way to cope with conflict. Each conflict style works in some situations but not in others. It is important that you be able to use any of the five conflict styles discussed as well as the style most appropriate for the situation.

I hope this book has helped you to understand the fundamentals and importance of effective communication. Through applying the communication tools discussed here, I am confident you can enhance the quality of your school climate and of your professional and personal relationships.

Annotated Bibliography and References

Annotated Bibliography

I have assembled the following selected annotations for those readers who would like to explore communication-related topics in more detail.

Adler, R., & Towne, N. (1993). *Looking out/looking in* (7th ed.). Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, College Dept.

This interpersonal course text covers the basics of interpersonal communication. Written by two leading speech communication scholars, the book is a practical guide for effective communication and cites numerous examples.

Conrad, C. (1985). *Strategic organizational communication: Cultures, situations, and adaptations.* New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Conrad's book examines the underlying concepts of communication in organizations. He compares the communication in traditional organizations, human relations and human resources organizations, and systems-contingency organizations. He describes ways of coping with various organizational situations, such as power and politics, organizational conflict and stress, and sex roles in organizations.

Geddes, D. (1992). Sex roles in management: The impact of varying power of speech style on union members' perception of satisfaction and effectiveness. *Journal of Psychology, 126,* 589-607.

This article reviews the literature on the perception versus the actual behaviors of male and female managers. Additionally, it examines previous studies on powerful and powerless speech styles. The author reports her research on union members' perception of speech style and sex roles for managers. The findings are consistent with current theories of effective management.

Goldhaber, F. (1990). *Organizational communication* (5th ed.). Dubuque, IA: William C. Brown.

A noted authority on communication in organizations, Goldhaber looks at theories of organizations, organizational climate, and verbal and nonverbal communication in organizations. He explains how to diagnose problem communication in an organization and make appropriate changes. He describes effective communication for one-on-one, small-group, and public communication in organizations.

Hall, E. (1959). *The silent language.* Greenwich, CT: Fawcett.

Hall's classic book on nonverbal communication looks at culture, time, accents, and space.

Hall, E. (1966). *The hidden dimension.* Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Another Hall classic on nonverbal communication, this book discusses culture and nonverbal communication. Hall also compares the similarities between humans' and animals' use of space, crowding, and social behavior.

Hanna, M., & Wilson, G. (1991). *Communicating in business and professional settings* (3rd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.

This text discusses the basics for effective communication in organizations. It reviews various communication perspectives for organizations: leadership and communication, small-group communication, and effective interpersonal skills.

Hayakawa, S. (1978). *Language in thought and action* (4th ed.). New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

In this classic book on how language affects our view of the world and our communication, Hayakawa discusses ways language and words can interfere with communication.

Lustig, M., & Koester, J. (1993). *Intercultural competence: Interpersonal communication across cultures.* New York: Harper's College Division.

Lustig and Koester's text is geared to a basic course in intercultural communication. They discuss communication differences for various cultures, subcultures, and racial and ethnic groups. Both verbal and nonverbal communication differences are discussed. They look at obstacles to effective communication across cultures and describe basic tools for improving intercultural competence.

Malandro, L., Barker, L., & Barker, D. (1989). *Nonverbal communication* (2nd ed.). New York: Random House.

This basic text in nonverbal communication describes nonverbal communication and its use in everyday settings. Nonverbal topics include the way one communicates using the body, clothing, movement, gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, space, territory, touch, and voice. The authors discuss cultural differences, including perception of time. People's perceptions and responses to various types of environments are also examined.

Mehrabian, A. (1981). *Silent messages: Implicit communication of emotions and attitudes* (2nd ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

This classic book on nonverbal communication describes ways we communicate liking and approach, emotions, dominance, contradictory messages, and social style through our nonverbal behavior. It also discusses the effect of environment on social interaction. The final chapter explains how nonverbal communication is used in business, personal relationships, advertising, political campaigns, and more.

Pearson, J., & Spitzberg, B. (1987). *Interpersonal communication: Concepts, components, and contexts* (2nd ed.). Dubuque, IA: William C. Brown.

This basic interpersonal text discusses the components of effective communication. Included are chapters on listening, perceptions, self-esteem, resolving conflict, and nonverbal communication.

Pearson, J., Turner, L., & Todd-Mancillas, W. (1991). *Gender & communication* (2nd ed.). Dubuque, IA: William C. Brown.

The first author, Judy Pearson, is nationally known for her research and writing on the effects of gender on communication.

This text, commonly used in gender communication classes, overviews the ways men and women differ in their communication. Additionally, it examines how communication forms (e.g., popular literature, media, and advertising) depict men and women. This guide to understanding gender differences in communication is useful for both personal and professional contexts.

Peters, T., & Waterman, R. (1982). *In search of excellence*. New York: Warner.

Peters and Waterman looked at some of the most successful companies in the United States to see what the secrets to their success were. This classic book describes the common ingredients of their success. They assessed financial success, innovativeness, consumer response, and employee relations. Their findings can apply to both private and public organizations. Condensed versions of the original book are available on audiotape and videotape. Although the book is long, it describes in detail the inner workings of the successful companies Peters and Waterman studied. The video version is lively, interesting, and highlights several of the companies they studied.

Samovar, A., & Porter, R. (1994). *Intercultural communication: A reader* (7th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

This collection of readings by foremost communication scholars focuses on various aspects of intercultural communication. Included is an introduction to cultural differences in communication, diversity in international cultures, subcultures within our own culture, nonverbal differences among cultures, becoming a competent communicator interculturally, and intercultural communication in multicultural societies.

Stewart, J. (Ed.). (1990). *Bridges not walls: A book about interpersonal communication* (5th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.

A basic book for interpersonal communication courses, this text describes skills for becoming an effective communicator. The authors discuss self-esteem, verbal and nonverbal communication, perception, listening, self-disclosure, confirming messages, relationships, conflict, communication between women and men, and communicating across cultures.

Wolvin, A., & Coakley, C. (1982). *Listening* (3rd ed.). Dubuque, IA: William C. Brown.

This book describes the need for effective listening, the process of listening, and effective listening skills.

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